

Some Experiences of Lord Syfret.

BY ARABELLA KENEALY.

STRONHEIM'S EXTREMITY.

ILLUSTRATED BY R. SAVAGE.

I HAD called on my friend the Keeper of Coins and Medals at the Museum. We had been College chums and did not stand on ceremony.

"I shall be busy for an hour," he said, as we shook hands. He pointed to a batch of medals, marred and defaced to bewildering extent. "I am getting to the end of them. If you can come back again I shall be delighted. We will lunch together." Or if you care to remain here till I have finished, I can give you a rare old folio to dip into."

"I will remain," I replied. "I enjoy this musty odour of antiquity."

The Keeper smiled. "If you were fated to endure as much of it as I do," he returned, "you would probably prefer oxygen."

Five minutes later an attendant entered.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

The Keeper glanced up through his spectacles displeased. He read the card before him.

"Did you tell him I am busy?"

"I told him, sir. He says it is urgent. It has to do with the Hierator coin."

"Ah!" The keeper laid down his magnifying glasses. If there were a tender spot in his heart the Hierator coin had found it. It was a superb specimen recently added to the collection under his charge. Its history was sufficiently recondite to have taxed without baffling his skill in the matter of classification, yet was it so well-preserved, the classic obverse so exquisite and clear, that even a tyro in the numismatic art like myself could not have failed to admire it. Apart from its beautiful workmanship, its value was determined by the fact that it belonged to a period whereof but few evidences remained. Moreover, it was an unique specimen, no other of its kind being known to exist. It had had a whole column of the *Times* devoted to it, a column that was a very

monument of lore. Its value in specie was variously estimated at from £50 to £2,000. It was probably worth £1,000, but the authorities of the Museum into whose possession it had come entertained not the remotest intention of parting with it. To them it was priceless, for it completed a series long incomplete.

The Keeper looked anxious. The source of the coin had not been altogether satisfactory, and he had suffered, he told me, not a few waking nightmares lest someone should turn up to establish a claim upon it.

"I will see the gentleman," he said.

He swept the mouldering bronze and silver heap before him into a drawer, which he carefully locked. Then he changed his glasses, and leaned back in his chair, his eyes on the door, an anxious fold between his brows.

"I wish I could feel secure about that Hierator," he remarked.

The attendant appeared presently ushering in a tall, thin, shabbily-dressed man. The man bowed squarely, and ceremoniously. He was obviously a foreigner.

"Herr Stronheim," the Keeper read, consulting the card and returning the bow, "what can I do for you?"

It may have been prejudice in the interests of the Hierator, but I thought he did not like the look of the man. His face was sharp and thin and his glances travelled nervously — almost furtively about the room.

"Sir, I am obliged to you," the stranger rejoined, with only a slight German accent, and in a pleasant enough voice. "I have a letter to you from Professor Von Brau, of Berlin. I take the liberty of presenting it in person."

"Von Brau, Von Brau?" the Keeper echoed dubiously, "do I know him?"

Stronheim seemed taken aback.

"I understood him to be a friend—a

friend of many years. Is it Doctor Keith Bernard I have the honour of addressing?"

"Yes, I am Dr. Bernard. With your permission I will read the letter. Please sit down."

The visitor sat down. His face was agitated. His glance still travelled furtively about the room. The Keeper reading the note observed him from time to time above his spectacles. It was briefly, I learned later, a letter of introduction. Professor Von Brau, dating

"You now remember the Professor?" Stronheim queried.

The Keeper shook his head.

"One meets so many gentlemen at conferences, and I fear I cannot for the moment recall your friend."

The German leaned forward in his chair. "May I nevertheless hope—" he began, hurriedly.

He stopped short. The Keeper noticed that his hand on the rail of his chair was trembling. It occurred to him, as it did

to me, that the man had had no breakfast.

"I made the journey on purpose—" Stronheim began again. His pinched face suggested at what cost

"I shall be glad," my friend responded, kindly, "if I can help you in any way. I am afraid if it should be a position you are seeking—"

Stronheim shook his head. "It is not that," he said. "You are very good. It is not that, but the matter is of much moment to me."

The Keeper implied by a gesture that he awaited Herr Stronheim's pleasure.

"You have here a coin—"

"The Hierator," Bernard interjected.

"The Hierator. May I be permitted to see it?"

The Keeper kept his eyes fixed on the other. Plainly this was a claimant.

"The Hierator is on public view in Coin Room No. III., in the centre case, facing the window," he said briefly, adding, "If you wish it I will send a man to point it out to you."

"Sir, you are good; but I wish more. I ask for the privilege to examine it closely—to take it in my hands."

The request was unusual. Bernard scanned him. Certainly, his credentials



"LET ME EXAMINE IT"

from a medical college in Berlin, recalled himself to the recollection of Dr. Keith Bernard, whom he had met some years earlier at an Antiquarian Congress. He begged to be allowed to present to Dr. Keith Bernard, Herr Stronheim, a gentleman with whom he himself was but slightly acquainted, though he came to him warmly commended by friends. There was some small matter wherein he should regard it as an honour to himself and a personal kindness if Dr. Keith Bernard would assist Herr Stronheim.

did not warrant the placing of much trust in him. He was shabby and ill-at-ease, and his boots, though decently blacked, were broken. In Britain we are apt to think lightly of men with broken boots, especially if we have reason for doubting that they have breakfasted. Moreover, I could see my friend was jealous for his Hierator.

"The request is unusual," he objected. "May I inquire the object?"

Stronheim evaded the question. "I but wish to take it in my hands one moment."

"You will surely explain your purpose."

"Pardon me, I must beg of you to permit me to reserve that."

Bernard hardened. Obviously no good was intended to his treasure.

"I fear, sir," he said, civilly, but firmly,

"I fear, then, I cannot comply with your request."

The German made a gesture of protest.

"Sir," he exclaimed, "you surely do not suspect me of—of what can you suspect me?"

"The request is unusual, and you give me no reason."

Stronheim put a hand to his throat and turned away. The fingers of the other hand grappled convulsively with the chair rail. After a minute he faced round.

"I cannot tell you the importance of this matter to me," he faltered. "My future—the future of others—depends upon it."

My friend had warm spots in his heart beside that occupied by the Hierator. I saw him weaken.

"Bless me," he said cordially, "if you are so anxious you shall see it."

"I too?" I motioned with my lips. He assented, smiling.

He took up his velvet skull cap, and cutting short the Teuton's effusive and guttural gratitude, with a British and kindly "Not at all, not at all," he preceded us across a lobby and up sundry steps to Room No. III. of Coins and Medals.

The great room, its walls lined with shelved glass cases, its space pervaded by them, only narrow intersections being left for the passage of visitors, was apparently empty; but a moment later a custodian, bearing his wand of office, respectfully joined us.

We went quickly down the narrow passages, the cases filled with green and mouldy-looking treasures seeming to

engulf us in a tomb-like silence. Nobody was there, since only the few take interest in coins.

The Keeper stopped before a case—he could have found his way there in the dark, I believe—and in the centre rested the Hierator, on the velvet bosom of a handsome casket. An inscription beneath recorded its date, and briefly a portion of its history.

Bernard, for the moment mindless of the stranger's possible designs upon his treasure, pointed it out with pride.

"There he is," he said, smiling, "there he is—the finest coin in our collection."

The German gazed with greedy eyes. He pressed his features close against the glass, examining it absorbedly. There was a strange light on his face.

The Keeper watched him, as did I. What was his motive? His eyes fastened on it as upon some long-loved prize.

He thrust a pale long-fingered hand toward it.

"Let me examine it," he broke out hoarsely.

I thought Bernard regretted his concession. But he was a man of his word. He fitted a key to the door. The custodian, wand in hand, stood by. He maintained a vigilant scrutiny of the stranger. Obviously he did not like his looks. Possibly he, too, suspected that the shabby foreigner had had no breakfast.

Bernard took the leather casket from the case, and held it a moment in his hand. He looked with pleasure and affection on its occupant. Then he passed it over to the German.

Stronheim bowed as he stretched his trembling fingers for it. His eyes devoured its every curve and marking. He bent above it with an ashen face. Soon he lost consciousness of everything beside. He did not see the respectful half-questioning glance of the custodian upon the Keeper, nor the Keeper's fixed scrutiny upon himself. He put a finger on the coin with a suggestion of lifting it from its casket.

"May I be permitted?" he inquired.

Bernard nodded. His face was grave. Certainly one might have suspected that this was the Hierator's lawful owner. Only one in whose possession it had been could love it as this man plainly did. The German removed it, setting the empty casket on a neighbouring case.

At that moment a man entering the

room by a door at the further end suddenly stumbled, and, with three clattering steps to recover his balance, and a loud guttural cry, measured his length on the floor. We all instinctively turned. There was a sound as of metal striking wood and ringing sharply, a muttered exclamation, and the German was down on hands and knees feeling and searching with his long blanching fingers.

"I started and dropped it," he explained tremulously.

We had turned our heads but for a second. As my glance swung back from the prostrate man at the end of the room, I thought I saw something fall and disappear. In a moment Bernard was on his knees. A few swift looks and sweeps of his hand sufficed to show him that the coin had vanished. If it were there at all it would take time to find. He turned his eyes from Stronheim's face, bent white and anxious on the floor, instinctively towards the figure of the man, who now erect, was leaving the room. Something in the latter's threadbare aspect, linked with the recollection of his guttural cry, seemed to impress him. He whispered the custodian. A moment later the custodian's steps were echoing loud and hollow down the room. He followed the stranger out through the lower doorway.

Bernard furtively turned up a coat sleeve, mentally measuring his strength against that of his adversary. He glanced at me with a grim expression.

"Sir, how can I express my regret," the German apologised, still searching with agitated eye and hand. "It was unpardonably awkward. But I am not well to-day. The man falling unnerved me. I let the Hierator drop. It must have rolled far."

There was a strange exultation in his voice. Under cover of his stooping posture he smiled secretly. He searched

with care, but the anxiety of some minutes earlier had died out of his face.

"You can laugh as you like, my man," the Keeper muttered in a savage aside, "but your troubles are only beginning. Britons are not so easily fooled."

The custodian now came back. He nodded to his superior's questioning eye.



"SUDDENLY STUMBLING"

Then he too went on hands and knees, apparently searching, but his gaze made significantly for one after another of the shabby German's pockets, as though he were speculating as to which at that moment concealed the Hierator.

Stronheim grew anxious. He began to search feverishly, and with a degree of wild aimlessness. He swept his glances near and far. His features worked. Then he put a curb on himself and fell to more methodically. He took a knife from his

pocket. We kept our eyes on him. He opened a blade and proceeded to slip it carefully some six or eight feet's length along the cracks between the boards. He probed thus every crack of the passage in which we stood. This failing, "Mein Gott!" he said, in hollow tones, straightening himself for a moment to get the ache out of his back. With a haggard face he started further down and worked slowly up the floor, dragging the knife-blade vigilantly in the crevices, his ear inclined, his fingers a-search for the clink of metal as though his life depended on it. He carried this manœuvre several yards further in either direction up the room.

As one after another the cracks failed him, his hands trembled visibly. The Keeper and custodian had risen to their feet. They viewed him with disapproving faces, faces that spoke of rising exasperation at this which seemed to them a farce.

The German, absorbed in his efforts, paid them no heed. Bernard turned, closed the door of the case whence the Hierator had been taken, and locked it.

A party of children entering and detecting the group—one man on hands and knees—clattered hurriedly up the room, the small feet of the younger members of the party multiplying the footsteps of those bigger by hollow two-to-ones as they scrambled along, keeping pace with their elders. The custodian motioned them. They remained at a distance disappointed, but breathlessly whispering and watching with widely-opened eyes.

"Mein Gott!" the German exclaimed again, as he came to the end of the longer span of cracks without finding anything. The sweat stood thick on his face. He looked up to where we stood regarding him.

"I have never seen such a thing," he cried. "It dropped. I saw it strike the floor and roll, and then it disappeared. I could swear it rolled no farther than this."

He indicated a spot with a broken boot.

The Keeper and custodian regarded the boot.

A clock clanged twelve. Stronheim started up.

"If you permit it," he addressed Bernard, "I will return in an hour, and search till it is found. Lock up the room and I will go carefully over every inch.

I have at a quarter past twelve an appointment with the Consul. But I will return at once."

The custodian laughed outright.

The Keeper regarded him sternly.

"Monstrous!" he said. "Do you suppose I shall allow you to leave this place until the coin is found? Is it of any use to continue this farce?"

Stronheim stood staring at him.

Then "Himmel!" he protested, "do you suspect me of stealing it?"

Bernard made a movement of impatience.

"The coin must be found before you leave," he rejoined shortly.

"Must I lose my appointment with the Consul, sir?"

"Undoubtedly."

The German wiped his brow helplessly.

"What an unfortunate I am," he muttered, "and just as I hoped everything. Sir, I swear to you—sir, I am a man of birth and education. I assure you——"

Bernard cut him short.

"I have made no accusation, I only demand the coin. A few minutes since it was in your possession, where is it now?"

"On the floor, sir, assuredly, somewhere on the floor. It must be to be found."

"Assuredly," my friend returned, "it must be to be found."

The German went again on hands and knees.

The children from their distance watched him breathlessly. They also ran their sharp eyes over the floor. To them the scene was absorbingly interesting. What was the man on the floor so anxiously hunting? And would he find it? And if he did not find it what would happen? It was a thousand times more diverting than old pennies and mouldy things in glass cases. The German rose to his feet again.

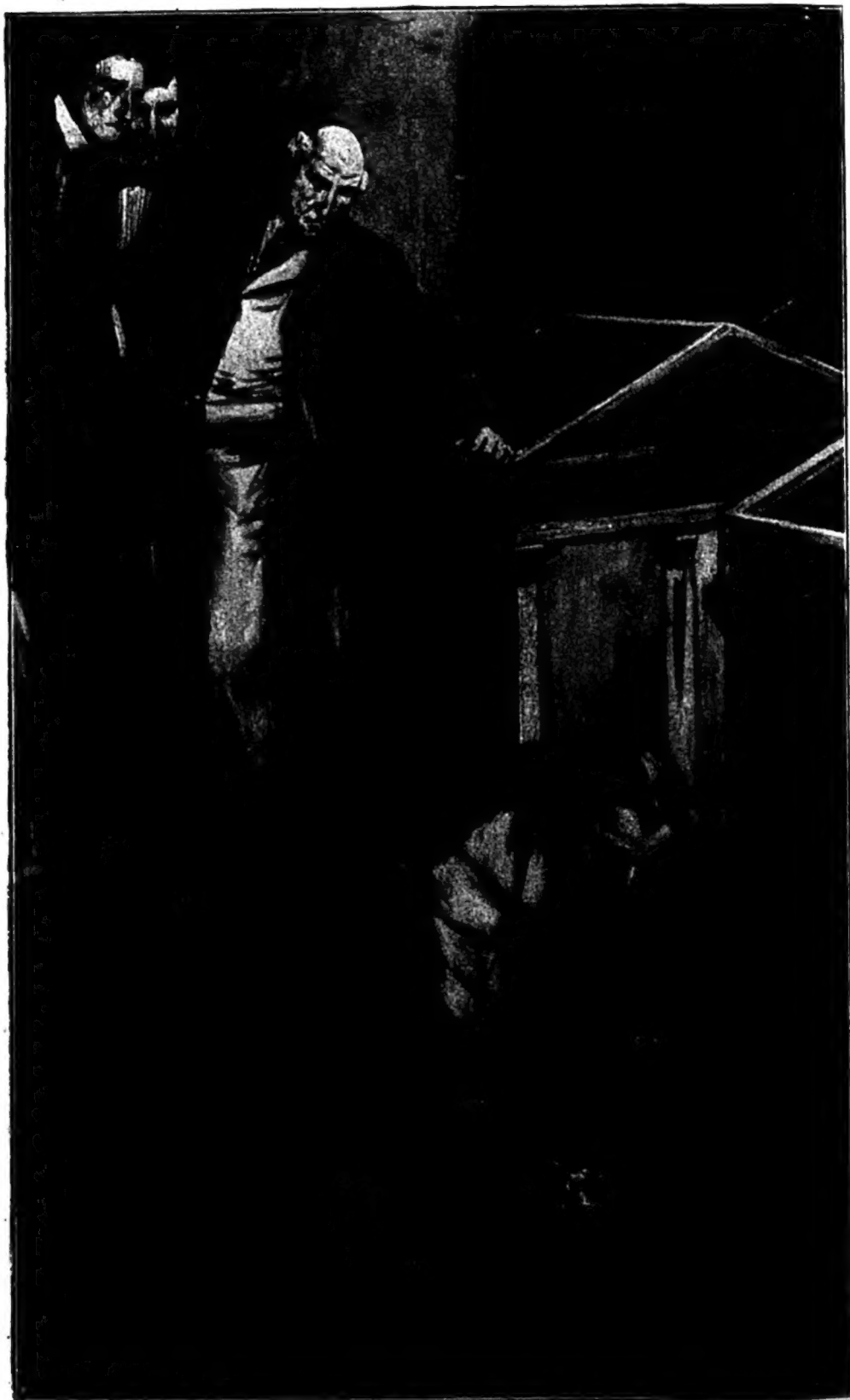
"I have failed," he admitted, spreading his hands out with a fatalistic gesture. He glanced towards the fog-darkened windows. "The light is little," he deprecated.

"It will be my unpleasant duty to have you searched," the Keeper said, "unless the coin be at once produced. I have wasted time enough."

Yet he seemed sorry for the man, as I was. He was obviously a person of cultivation, despite his poor condition.

Stronheim started as though he had been struck.

"Searched?" he echoed, in a hollow



"HE PROBED EVERY CRACK IN THE PASSAGE"

voice. "Searched!" he repeated terror-stricken. He steadied himself against the corner of a cabinet. He panted as if he had run a race. The Keeper observed him. Why should he dread being searched if he had not the coin? If he were innocent he would surely court inquiry. There was but one inference to be drawn.

"It is our routine practice," he said shortly.

The German was taken with convulsive shuddering. The custodian eyed him contemptuously. He glanced impatiently at his superior. What was the good of this fuss? Why did he not straightway hand him over to the police? He attracted Bernard's attention. His lips formed a voiceless word. Bernard shook his head. Give the poor devil a chance, he indicated compassionately, only—his face hardened—the Hierator must be found.

The German composed himself. "I refuse to be searched," he cried. He wiped the sweat-crop from his brow. "I refuse to be searched," he repeated.

"Why should you mind if you are innocent?"

"Why should I mind? I mind much. It is—it is—" he was manifestly seeking excuse—"it is an insult. You suspect me of theft. I come to you as one gentleman to another, sir. I bring a letter of introduction from Professor Von Brau—"

"I have no alternative," the Keeper answered. He had now not a doubt as to the other's guilt. His dread of being searched convicted him out of hand.

"I will look again," Stronheim said desperately, sweeping a swift instinctive glance toward the door. But the custodian forestalled him, moving a few paces between it and the suspect. Stronheim understood and glared upon him. He made a gesture of despair. Then he took out a pencil, and marking off an area still larger than that he had already gone over, and using his handkerchief dusterwise, he swept every inch of the floor. He found nothing.

He shook his head and muttered:

"I will never be searched."

He took a box of matches from a pocket, and striking half a dozen at a time, he scanned the boards minutely.

Still he found nothing.

"Gott im Himmel," he muttered again, "they shall never search me."

He started slipping his knife along the

cracks again, taking the wider area. But nothing came of it. He went over the ground once more: with no result. He sat up, and covering his face with his hands moaned under his breath.

"I give it up," he wailed brokenly. "Fate is against me. Some devil is in it."

"You will submit to be searched."

He threw out his palms. His eyes seemed to start out of his head.

"Then I am a lost man," he exclaimed.

"You had better give the coin up," Bernard remarked quietly.

"I have it not." Yet his hand went instinctively to an inner pocket.

"If you do not give it up I must send for the police."

Stronheim stared stupidly before him.

"I am a lost man," he mumbled. Then he suddenly swayed, and fell forward on his face. In the excitement ensuing the children drew nearer. They thought he was dead. It was a rare morning's entertainment indeed—to see a man die.

"Shall I take it from him, sir?" the custodian queried, his hand on the German's coat.

The Keeper shook his head.

"It's here in his breast pocket," the man urged. "I can feel it through the cloth."

"Let it be," the other said. "Undo his collar, and open the window."

Stronheim had just unclosed his lids and was blinking the misery awaiting him into his consciousness, when suddenly a commotion rose among the children.

"It's mine." "No 'taint, I seed it furst." "Oh! you little liar, I seed it." "I picked it up anyways." "Give it me!" "Give it me!" "Yes giv' it 'm, he's my bruvver."

The cries waxed to a hubbub. The custodian bore down upon them. Two boys were on the point of blows. The man rapped their heads with his wand.

"Now then, clear out, you youngsters. Make yourselves scarce, I say."

The boys sobered. They eyed one another muttering fiercely. One whimpered.

"Now then, clear out, or the police will have you," the custodian threatened.

"He's got my penny," the whimpering boy protested.

"'Taint yours, and 'taint a penny," the other retorted.

The chorus began again. "You're a liar, I seed it first." "Giv' it him, he's my bruvver."

The custodian rapped heads and knuckles indiscriminately. "Police!" he called, in a loud whisper.

As the boys scuffled, something fell to the ground. A girl darted toward it. But the custodian was before her. He had it in his hand. He examined it amazedly. It was the Hierator!



"IT WAS THE HIERATOR"

"Where did you find it?" he demanded. "I picked it up," the boy exclaimed. "I seed it lying be'ind the leg of a taible, and I picked it up. It's mine, not Bill's." "It isn't either of yours," the custodian said. "It belongs here. Now then, be off with you."

He was considerably crestfallen. He had been so confident of the German's guilt.

Bernard strode towards him.

"God bless me," he said, taking the Hierator tenderly. "Who would have thought it? Here children," he called to the departing and depressed youngsters, "here's a shilling between you. Twopence a piece, big and little."

The German smiled faintly when they laid it before him.

"I told you," he murmured. "I am no thief. But, mein Gott, what a fright I have had!"

"Why in the name of all that is inexplicable did you refuse to be searched," the Keeper asked some minutes later, when the still faint Stronheim reclined in his room, imbibing strength from brandy and water. The other German, whom they had taken for an accomplice, and placed under detention, had been released, and the Hierator had been safely locked into its case again.

The German smiled. Then he sat up and looked at us one after the other.

He put a hand into his breast pocket, and, with an air of mystery, drew out a small object. Still smiling he held it toward Bernard.

"Good Heavens!"

—the Hierator. I thought I had—"

"So you did, sir. This is not your Hierator, though a Hierator. I picked it up in an old iron shop in Vienna. Till I chanced upon the article in your *Times* I had no notion that the coin was worth money. I brought it over to compare with yours. I had been unfortunate. An illness robbed me of a good position. My money was gone. My family was

starving. Just then a good opening offered, but it needed some £500 capital. I read your *Times*. I spent my remaining funds in coming to England. You kindly permitted me to examine the coin. I found it identical with mine. It was my last hope. If I had failed, Heaven knows what would have become of us!"

There was a moment's silence. He resumed.

"You ask me why I refused to be searched. I ask you and this gentleman"—he bowed towards me—"what chance should I have had with a Hierator, a coin understood to be unique, in my pocket. Would anybody have troubled to look further? I should have been convicted of theft—ruined. Now——"

He spread out his hands with his

former fatalistic gesture. But this time he expressed that destiny left nothing to be desired. My friend looked gloomy for the space of a minute. The uniqueness of the Hierator had been such a feather in the cap of his collection. Then the man got the better of the numismatist.

He stepped forward and shook the German's trembling hand.

"I congratulate you, sir," he said heartily. "Any museum of consequence, or private collector, will give you at least £1,000 for it."

"In the meantime," I suggested, "if you and this gentleman," indicating Stronheim, "will give me the pleasure of your company, we will go and get some lunch"



FACING THE MUSIC

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY HUGHES AND MULLINS

From Generation to Generation.

THE DUKES AND DUCHESSES OF RUTLAND.



FIRST DUKE



THIRD WIFE OF FIRST DUKE



WIFE OF SECOND DUKE



THIRD DUKE